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HER GREAT CAPTURE

By IRMA D. WILSON.
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Miss Amy Pettengill was in a dreadful position. It was 9 o'clock at night. She was alone in the house, and she had warning that burglars were coming. There had been a ring at the doorbell. She had answered it, but found no one. A bit of paper fluttered down as she opened the door, and, picking it up, she read, "Burglars tonight."

This bare statement of the fact was enough to put Miss Pettengill in a tremor. She was not interested to know why or by whom she had been warned, but the thought flashed through her mind that some one of the gang had turned against his fellows either through a stricken conscience or revenge.

But what was she to do? The family had left her for the night with only a maid, and the maid had disappeared. Had she anything to do with the proposed burglary? Probably. She was a new girl and had been employed without a "character." There was no telephone connection, the house stood half a mile from any other, and the night was stormy. Nevertheless Miss Pettengill put on her rubbers, took an umbrella and was about to go for assistance when she heard voices without. She stood still in the hall, paralyzed with terror. Then came a ring at the doorbell.

To refuse admittance to any one who proposed to rob the house was absurd. An entrance could be forced at any opening. The front door even was not locked. Her only defense was stratagem. She would admit the burglar, pretend not to know what he had come for and watch an opportunity—that is, if he did not bind and gag her—in the hope of putting him in a corner. Summoning all the resolution there was left in her, she opened the door. There stood a man in a rubber suit from which the rain was dripping.

"I would like," he said, "to get shelter for awhile. It's a bad night and I can't go on."

"Certainly," said Miss Pettengill, dissembling. "Come in."

"Where shall I put this wet suit?" he asked. "I don't wish to spoil your rugs."

"Go right up on to the third floor. There is a bathroom there. You can lay your suit in the tub."

The man looked a trifle surprised, but made no objection. Miss Pettengill led the way. The prospect of success of a trap she was laying gave her courage, and she became momentarily elated. The bathroom was in the center of the house, with no window, ventilated and lighted by a small opening in the roof. The man entered and was throwing off his rubber coat when Miss Pettengill, who had gone a little ahead and changed the key from inside to outside, closed the door and locked it. Then she proceeded to faint.

When she came to herself she heard a loud knocking at the bathroom door. She got on her feet and staggered downstairs. Doubtless the man she had shut up had been sent in to reconnoiter. His pals would probably wait for a signal. She sat down to think.

She sat perfectly still for a long while, an hour perhaps, but heard no sound except an occasional knocking above. After awhile even it ceased. Midnight came. Being tired and worn with excitement, she threw herself on a lounge. The excitement kept her awake for awhile, but in time she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was broad daylight. She was surprised to see the sash of a window raised. There was also a peculiar smell, which she soon recognized as chloroform. Getting up, she went across the hall into the dining room. The drawers of the sideboard were open and what silver had been left there was gone. Running upstairs, she found that the bureau drawers, closets, etc., had been ransacked.

She listened for a sound from the bathroom, where she had caged the advance burglar. Hearing nothing, she ran upstairs, tripped lightly to the door, listened, tried the knob and found it still locked. There was a faint sound as of one breathing in sleep.

Miss Pettengill ran all the way to the nearest house, where she found the family at breakfast.

"Our house has been robbed!" she exclaimed and dropped into a chair.

"Are you Miss Pettengill?" asked a lady at the head of the table excitedly.

"Yes."

"Oh, heavens! Has my son been killed?"

"Your son?"

"Yes. A bit of paper was left here last night saying that your house would be robbed during the night. My son thought it might be a hoax, but concluded to go to your protection. He said he wouldn't frighten you by telling you about the robbers. He'd just go in and be there in case they came."

"Oh, my goodness gracious!"

"Tell me quick. Is he dead?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I locked him in the bathroom."

There was a hurried return to the plundered house, and the bathroom was unlocked. A young man who had made a bed of the tub emerged, who without his rubber outfit and Miss Pettengill's distorted imagination bore no resemblance whatever to a burglar. Indeed, he was a very gentlemanly young man. He was much surprised to hear that the house had been entered and apologized for his mistake in not making himself known as a friend. Miss Pettengill's apology was simply that she had been a "nanny."

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